

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 03856 110819Z
ACTION NEA-10

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UNCLAS NEW DELHI 3856

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: UPROAR IN PARLIAMENT OVER PM'S REMARKS ON SIKKIM MERGER

REF: NEW DELHI 3780

1. ON MARCH 9 AND 10, THE TWO HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT WITNESSED UNRULY SCENES OVER PRIME MINISTER DESAI'S REPORTED STATEMENT TO "THE NEW YORK TIMES" THAT SIKKIM'S MERGER WITH INDIA WAS "NOT A DESIRABLE STEP" (REFTEL. SEVERAL OPPOSITION MEMBERS, ESPECIALLY OF THE TWO CONGRESS PARTIES AND CPI, STRONGLY OBJECTED TO THE STATEMENT, ALLEGED THAT DESAI HAD "INSULTED PARLIAMENT AND THE NATION," AND DEMANDED THAT DESAI APOLOGIZE. IN THE RAJYA SABHA AGITATED OPPOSITION MEMBERS BLOCKED THE CONDUCT OF SCHEDULED BUSINESS FOR AN HOUR AND A HALF AND WALKED OUT UNTIL DESAI CAME TO EXPLAIN HIS REMARKS.

2. SPEAKING IN THE RAJYA SABHA MARCH 9, DESAI RECALLED THAT AT THE TIME OF THE 1975 MERGER, HE HAD OBJECTED TO MANNER IN WHICH SIKKIM WAS BROUGHT INTO THE INDIAN UNION. HE REITERATED HIS VIEW THAT THE MERGER WAS CARRIED OUT IN AN "UNDESIRABLE MANNER," BUT DENIED THAT HE HAD USED UNCLASSIFIED

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WORD "ANNEXATION" IN THE INTERVIEW. THE PM ASSERTED THAT SIKKIM'S POSITION AS A CONSTITUENT PART OF INDIA WAS SETTLED FACT AND THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF CHANGING IT. DESAI CHARACTERIZED AS BASELESS THE CHARGE THAT BY MAKING THE STATEMENT HE HAD SUPPORTED AMERICA OR HAD PROVIDED A HANDLE TO INDIA'S CRITICS. HE RULED OUT HIS WITHDRAWING OR

APOLOGIZING FOR HIS REMARKS IN THE INTERVIEW.
DESAI ALSO RECALLED THAT HE HAD OPPOSED THE MANNER
IN WHICH GOA WAS MERGED AND HAD CONVEYED HIS FEELINGS
TO PRIME MINISTER NEHRU. THE TWO CONGRESSES AND THE
CPI RAISED THE ISSUE IN THE LOK SABHA ON MARCH 10
AND STAGED A WALK-OUT AFTER THE PM REITERATED HIS
POSITION THAT HIS REMARKS WERE HIS "PERSONAL VIEWS."

3. OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT, THE TWO CONGRESS PARTIES
CONDEMNED DESAI'S STATEMENT. THE CONGRESS (I) PARLIAMENTARY
PARTY, WHICH MET MARCH 9, EXPRESSED "SHOCK AND CONCERN."
MRS. GANDHI, WHO PRESIDED OVER THE MEETING, TOOK STRONG
EXCEPTION TO DESAI'S STATEMENT AND SAID SIKKIM WAS
NOT A SEPARATE COUNTRY. THERE ARE ALSO PRESS REPORTS
THAT THE PM WAS QUESTIONED BY HIS OWN MP'S ON THE
MATTER AT A MEETING OF THE JANATA PARLIAMENTARY
PARTY.
GOHEEN

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